



Slavery

History of Slavery in the United states

Approximately 645,000 black Africans were shipped to the United States from the 16th to the 19th centuries. Chained together and crammed side-by-side into the reeking holds of slave ships, tens of thousands died enduring the trans-Atlantic voyage known as the Middle Passage. Congress banned the importation of slaves into the United States in 1808. While this ended the horrors of the Middle Passage, it did nothing to stop the spread of slavery. By 1860, some four million people in the U.S. were enslaved.

President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 declared that all slaves within the Confederate States "are, and henceforward shall be free." It did not, however, free the slaves in the border states of the Union. It was only with the passage of the 13th Amendment to the constitution in December of 1865 that slavery was banned in all of the United States.

Slavery in Louisiana

Slavery first came to Louisiana in 1706, when 20 Native Americans of the Chitimacha people were captured by the French in one of the frequent battles between the early colonists and the native peoples. The first African slaves in Louisiana were six people captured by the French army during the War of Spanish Succession in 1710. By 1721, some 2,000 Africans had been imported into the Louisiana colony, primarily for work in the fields of indigo, sugar cane and tobacco.

By 1850, slaves made up almost half of Louisiana's population. Nine out of ten slaves in Louisiana worked on rural farms and plantations. By 1860 there were 332,000 enslaved workers in Louisiana.

Both men and women labored in the fields and houses. The men specialized in skilled work such as carpentry or blacksmithing, and the women cared for the children. The majority of slaves worked from sunrise to sunset and beyond.

While very few masters ever allowed slaves to learn to read and write, legislation passed in Louisiana in 1830 made it a crime to do so. Out of necessity, the slaves were thus forced to carry on the African tradition of conveying information orally.

Among the most prosperous planters and farmers in Louisiana were the Cane River Creoles of Color, some of whom were slave-owners themselves. In 1860 there were 472 free, black Louisianans whose average real estate holdings were worth over \$10,000. There were also 9,434 slaves in Natchitoches Parish in 1860.

It is worth noting the vast majority of rural whites and free blacks in antebellum Louisiana lived on small or modest farms and owned no slaves, or at most a very few, and they often worked side-by-side with them in the fields.

Slavery at Magnolia

Ambrose LeCompte, owner of Magnolia, at one time owned 235 enslaved people. Some of these individuals are listed in a ledger which was compiled from 1845-1860. It contains names, ages, location of residence, estimations of value, and in some cases comments about particular slaves. It can be viewed online at www.nps.gov/cari/historyculture/magnolia-plantation-history.

Some of those slaves were housed in brick cabins. These cabins were built around 1845 and were double-pen, galleried cabins of saddle bag construction. A center wall divided each cabin in half, creating a room for two separate families. Each family had access to the central fireplace.



Life After Slavery

After the Civil War many of the former slaves continued to work at Magnolia as tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and day laborers. Their lives continued to revolve around the cabins.

Most of the cabins had vegetable and flower gardens, along with fenced in yards that enclosed chickens and other fowl. In the surrounding yards children would play and adults would socialize.

Over time changes were made to each of the buildings. Some of the key additions included; a connecting doorway in the dividing wall, tin roofs, wood floors, and electricity.

The cabins continued to be lived in as late as the 1970's. However as time went by and sharecropping ceased the cabins fell into disrepair.

In 1976 the Hertzog family donated the cabins to a preservation group from Natchitoches. By the early 1990's Museum Contents Inc. began to stabilize the buildings. When the park was established in 1994 they were donated to the National Park Service, along with thirteen acres and other outbuildings. Today the cabins are the only brick slave quarters in the state of Louisiana and one of the few plantations in the country that contain brick quarters for the once



Aunt Agnes, former Magnolia resident, was a midwife in the community. This picture was taken in 1922 when she claimed to be 119 years old. Image courtesy of Northwestern State University Cammie G. Henry Research Center.

